

Message Text

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FM SECSTATE WASHDC

TO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK IMMEDIATE

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BANGKOK PASS TO SAXBE

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QUOTE

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: MASS, IN, US

SUBJECT: MEETING WITH INDIAN PRESS ON ARMS ISSUE

1. NEA ASSISTANT SECRETARY ATHERTON MET WITH INDIAN PRESS
REPS (PARASURAM, INDIAN EXPRESS; CHAKRAPANI, PTI, AND UNNA,
STATESMAN -- SAGAR OF HINDU OUT OF TOWN) FEB. 24 FOR
SESSION ON BACKGROUND BASIS AS FOLLOW-UP TO NOON BRIEFING
FEBRUARY 24 WHEN LIFTING OF ARMS EMBARGO ANNOUNCED.

2. ATHERTON REEMPHASIZED THAT WE MADE DECISION IN BROAD
POLICY FRAMEWORK THAT ACCEPTED SIMLA PROCESS AND INDIA'S
POSITION AS PRINCIPAL REGIONAL POWER. WE INTENDED NEITHER
TO UPSET PRESENT STRATEGIC BALANCE NOR FUEL AN ARMS RACE.
IT WAS OUR HOPE THAT INDO-AMERICAN RELATIONSHIP SUFFICIENT-
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LY BROADENED OVER PAST YEAR THAT ARMS QUESTION WOULD BE

PUT IN PERSPECTIVE AND NOT BE SEEN AS OVERRIDING BILATERAL ISSUE.

3. ANSWERING QUERY WHY WE HAD ACTED NOW, ATHERTON SAID AFTER BHUTTO VISIT, WE CONCLUDED IT NO LONGER SEEMED LOGICAL TO CONTINUE POLICY BEGUN UNDER WIDELY DIFFERING CIRCUMSTANCES. SECRETARY HAD MADE CLEAR IN DELHI WE HAD QUESTION UNDER REVIEW. ATHERTON STRESSED THAT THIS WAS NOT A HASTY DECISION BUT THE RESULT OF A LONG-TERM REVIEW AND EMPHASIZED THAT WE HAD EXTENDED CONSULTATIONS WITH INDIANS. WE WERE FULLY AWARE OF GOI VIEWS, WHICH WE TRIED TO TAKE

INTO ACCOUNT IN DESCRIBING HOW WE INTENDED IMPLEMENT THE NEW POLICY. ATHERTON SAID WE HOPED INDIANS WOULD NOT JUMP TO CONCLUSIONS BUT WOULD WAIT AND SEE WHAT HAPPENS BEFORE JUDGING NEW POLICY.

4. ATHERTON REITERATED THAT WE WERE INSTITUTING A POLICY VERY DIFFERENT FROM PRE-1965 WHEN WE BACKED WHAT INDIA SAW AS AN ATTEMPT TO ESTABLISH MILITARY PARITY BETWEEN INDIA AND PAKISTAN. WE ACCEPTED THAT PAKISTAN COULD NOT BE THE MILITARY EQUAL OF INDIA. WE WERE NOT TRYING TO UPSET THE PRESENT BALANCE BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES.

5. PARASURAM ASKED WHAT WE MEANT IN DESCRIBING PAKISTAN AS "ALLY". ATHERTON SAID WE HAD CLOSE TIES WITH PAKISTAN UNDER 1959 AGREEMENT WHICH DIFFERENT THAN STATE OF RELATIONS WITH COUNTRIES WITH WHOM WE HAD NO SUCH ARRANGEMENT. ON OTHER HAND, TIES WITH PAKISTAN OBVIOUSLY NOT SAME AS WITH NATO COUNTRIES WHERE WE VERY CLOSELY LINKED IN FULL ALLIANCE.

6. ON SIMLA PROCESS, ATHERTON STRESSED THAT IT WAS OUR VIEW LIFTING OF EMBARGO WOULD HELP PAKISTAN STAY WITH POLICY OF RECONCILIATION WITH INDIA. WE RECOGNIZE THAT GOI TAKING DIFFERENT VIEW AT THIS POINT, BUT THIS OBVIOUSLY MATTER OF JUDGMENT.

7. QUESTION OF CHAVAN VISIT WAS ALSO DISCUSSED. ATHERTON SAID ON DEEP BACKGROUND THAT ONCE DECISION TAKEN IT WAS LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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UNREALISTIC EXPECT IT WOULD REMAIN OUT OF PUBLIC DOMAIN VERY LONG. WE THEREFORE PLANNED EARLY ANNOUNCEMENT AND WANTED TO ACT BEFORE CHAVAN CAME TO AVOID BURDENING HIM WITH PROBLEM. IN RESPONSE TO QUERY, ATHERTON ACKNOWLEDGED POSSIBILITY EXISTED THAT SECRETARY WOULD NOT BE BACK FROM MIDDLE EAST TRIP BY TIME CHAVIN DUE TO COME ALTHOUGH ATHERTON EMPHASIZED THIS WAS QUITE APART FROM ARMS ISSUE AND IN ANY CASE IT TOO SOON TO PREDICT IF THIS PROBLEM

WOULD ARISE. IF SECRETARY NOT HERE, ACTING SECRETARY
WOULD BE AVAILABLE TO HOST JOINT COMMISSION MEETING
SHOULD CHAVAN COME OR WE COULD DISCUSS WITH CHAVAN AD-
JUSTMENT OF DATES TO MUTUALLY AGREEABLE TIME.

8. PARASURAM ASKED WHETHER WE FLATLY RULING OUT GWADAR
BASE. ATHERTON SAID THAT THIS NOT DISCUSSED AND WE HAD
NO INTENTION TO DISCUSS IT.

9. ON QUESTION OF NUCLEAR ASSURANCE FROM PAKISTAN,
ATHERTON SAID WE JUDGED BHUTTO'S WILLINGNESS TO ACCEPT
INTERNATIONAL SAFEFUARDS ON NUCLEAR FACILITIES AND TO
FOREGO DEVELOPING NUCLEAR EXPLOSIVE CAPABILITY AS A

POSITIVE FACTOR IN EVALUATING PROS AND CONS OF ARMS
POLICY DECISION. HE STRESSED THAT THIS WAS STATEMENT
OF PAKISTANI INTENT AND POLICY, NOT A BILATERAL AGREEMENT,
BUT ONE WHICH WE FELT SHOULD BE ACCEPTED ON GOOD FAITH.

10. WHEN PARASURAM SAID OUR ACTION WOULD STIR A STORM
IN INDIA, ATHERTON SAID IT WAS OUR HOPE THAT WHEN THE
STORM PASSED, WE COULD CONTINUE THE EFFORT OF BUILDING
MORE DURABLE RELATIONS WHICH WE HAD UNDER WAY DURING THE
PAST YEAR.
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